

BOOK REVIEWS

In conclusion all venerologists recognize that Colonel Burke has been a mainstay of the society of which this periodical is the expression. He is recognized as the able organizer who made the statistics of the Salford Clinic a source of speculation and comment. An individual must act and write according to the faith that is in him. Many, perhaps most, of the members of the Society for the Study of Venereal Disease will disagree with Colonel Burke heartily. But he is well able to reply to criticism: his agile brain is not easily cornered, and now he has penetrated into the remote fastnesses of bacteriology and shrills defiance. He simply asks for caustic commentary, but a book does not die of talk or even harsh criticism, but of neglect and apathy. So we can all discuss his new production, even fiercely, but we cannot be indifferent. A gust of talk, even a gale, will speed the craft which now carries our good wishes.

R. C. L. B.

SYPHILIS IN EARLIER DAYS. By J. R. Whitwell, M.B. Pp. viii, 90. Crown 8vo. Price 5s. net. H. K. Lewis & Co. Ltd., London, 1940.

THE author states that this little book is written "in the cause of truth only." Its object is to enable the reader to come to a decision as to whether syphilis was first introduced into Europe by the crews of the *Nina* and *Pinta* in 1493, or whether it had already existed in the Old World from ancient times—long before the return of Columbus from his first voyage to the West Indies. Dr. Whitwell states that "the case must be decided upon the balance of the evidence produced." That is a very right and proper sentiment; but, right at the beginning, he shows his mind to be already made up for, in the second paragraph of his first chapter occurs the following curious sentence: "Firstly, it can be shown that syphilis existed in France, Spain, Naples and elsewhere before Columbus returned from his voyage, and some say even before he started on his first voyage." The curious point is that by the last eleven words of that sentence the author clearly implies that there are actually some people who believe that syphilis appeared between the morning of the 4th of August, 1492, when the squadron sailed from Palos, and the evening of the 15th of March, 1493, when the two surviving ships again dropped anchor in that port.

In his book, Dr. Whitwell, for some reason best known to himself, utterly fails to produce the best evidence in favour of the Columbian origin of syphilis, and merely cites a cloud of so-called witnesses for the other side. The contemporary evidence of Ruy Diaz de Isla, of Las Casas, of Oviedo and others is suppressed. Upon the vital matter of pre-Columbian syphilitic bones, no reference is made to the researches of Elliot Smith or of Williams. The author is also apparently unaware of the X-ray studies by Means carried out upon prehistoric Indian bones found in Ohio.

The book shows no evidence of any real research or, indeed, of any profound acquaintance with the enormous literature on the subject. There is no critical examination or evaluation of such evidence as is produced. All that the author does is to quote some pre-Columbian

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writer and then speculate as to what that writer meant when he described certain signs and symptoms. It is all rather futile as it is always bound to be when the author of such a work is not an experienced syphilologist.

In short, this volume contributes nothing whatever to the study of the history of syphilis.

E. T. B.